

Marine institutes and associations

Mineral Wealth...Seabed Health

By Silvana Birchenough

Defra's Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) has enabled scientific surveys and state-of-the-art seabed images to be available in a fun and interactive way at the National Marine Aquarium (NMA) in Plymouth. The "Mineral Wealth – Seabed Health" project, at the ExplorOcean gallery, will offer lively displays and interactive touch-screen activities for young people and the general public alike. The project exhibition will open in March 2007.



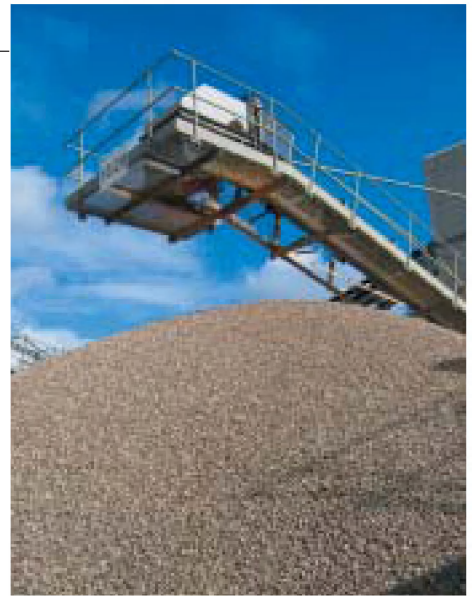
The Marine Biological Association (MBA), the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) and the NMA are developing this exciting environmental management resource with funding of £138,000 distributed by ALSF via English Nature. It combines sound scientific research, which assesses the status of seabed substrata and associated marine communities in aggregate extraction sites, with direct language and easily accessible displays that are so much a part of science communication today.

CEFAS is an internationally renowned aquatic scientific research and consultancy centre with over 100 years of experience. It has undertaken the vast majority of research in the UK into the effects of aggregate extraction on

seabed biology. CEFAS' extensive data holdings provide the bedrock of imagery that underpins this project. Its contribution includes side-scan sonar images, collected from its research vessel the *RV CEFAS Endeavour*. In addition, bathymetric information, video clips and still images all will help to promote and excite the public about marine life, and the role of surveys and scientific exploration.

Dr Silvana Birchenough said: "We're really excited about making our material more easily accessible to the general public. We've got some stunning images that really unlock the secrets of the seabed to a wider audience."

A dedicated website (www.mineralwealth-seabedhealth.org), hosted by the Marine Life



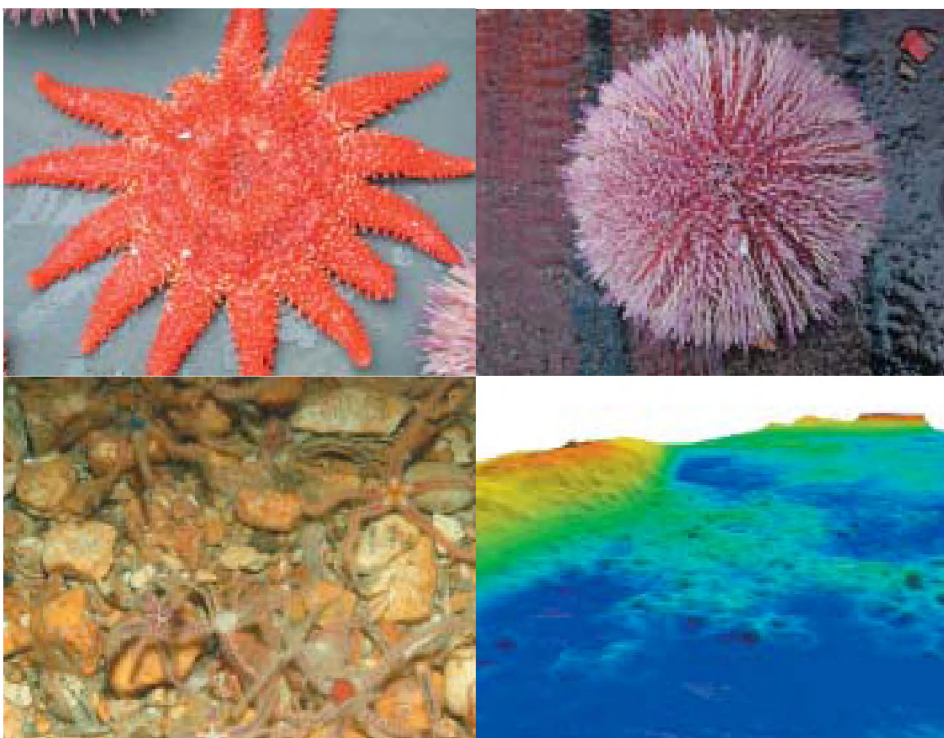
Sand and gravel resources (MBA).

Information Network (MarLIN) team at the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth, forms the backbone to the project. The MarLIN team have long worked in tandem with the NMA, who have experience of interpreting science and working with schools. Interactive learning resources and a teacher's pack are also being developed as part of the project. They will be accessible from the website or available on CD-ROM.

The MarLIN team have developed internet-based information and education resources since 1998. They have particular expertise in developing live access to up-to-date information and displaying that information on the internet. The MarLIN programme has already worked with the marine aggregates industry to access datasets and progress them to the UK National Biodiversity Network. It has developed data-mapping software to display survey information and uses geographic information systems (GIS) to bring together survey data and sensitivity assessments.

The NMA is the largest marine aquarium in the UK and has, since 1998, developed as a major educational resource, with approximately 70% of visitors coming from outside the south Devon area. It has developed many interactive displays and has a network of touch-screen computers for exploring information resources. NMA staff are skilled at presenting information to the public, and especially young people, in a way that engages and enthuses them.

- For more information see the following links:
- CEFAS: www.Cefas.co.uk
- MarLIN: www.marlin.ac.uk
- NMA: www.national-aquarium.co.uk



Clockwise from top left: Sunstar (*Crossaster papposus*); Sea urchin (*Echinus esculentus*); Multibeam imagery; Brittle stars on coarse substratum.

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